

**DEAD FLIES, SNAKE BITES, AND THE MOCKINGBIRD:
A TALE OF WISE MEN AND FOOLS
(Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:20)**

Life In Between: The Book of Ecclesiastes

“The stupidity of man consists and expresses itself in the fact that when he is of the opinion that he achieves his true nature and essence apart from the knowledge of God, without hearing and obeying His Word, in this independence and autonomy, he always misses his true nature and essence.”

~Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*

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Ecclesiastes 9:13-16

I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. 14 There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. 15 But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. 16 But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

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Matthew 7:24-27

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

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Ecclesiastes 9:17-10:1

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

10:1 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

Ecclesiastes 10-:2-3

A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left. 3 Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

Ecclesiastes 10:4-7

If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest. 5 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: 6 folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. 7 I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

James 3:17

**But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable,
gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial
and sincere.**

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Ecclesiastes 10:5-7

There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: 6 folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. 7 I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

Ecclesiastes 10:8-11

He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. 9 He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. 10 If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed. 11 If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

Ecclesiastes 10:12-15

The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness. 14 A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him? 15 The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.

Proverbs 10:19

**When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but
whoever restrains his lips is prudent.**

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Ecclesiastes 10:16-19

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! 17 Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness! 18 Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. 19 Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

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Ecclesiastes 10:20

Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

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Luke 12:2-3

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 3 Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

Ecclesiastes 10:20

Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

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“What if Christians were known for our quietness rather than our venomous attacks, or for our kindness rather than our inflammatory tempers? What if Christians conducted themselves ‘in wisdom toward outsiders’ (Col. 4:5), as Paul called the non Christians in his days? Maybe we would gain the ear of the king and of the culture. Maybe our calm, careful, clear, and concise words would ‘open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ’ (Col. 4:3). Maybe. Shall we give God’s truth a try?

~Douglas O’Donnell, *Ecclesiastes*

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James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

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